

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF

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Summer Programs

The need for youth to be supervised and safe does not end with the school year. For this reason, summer programs like those funded by the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program are vital for the well-being of youth. Summer schools have traditionally served youth who are in need of remedial academic assistance, though many schools and community-based organizations have created programs which provide recreation and extracurricular learning for all youth. Like afterschool programs, summer programs keep kids safe, help working families and improve academic achievement.

Summer programs are also critical to ensuring that youth receive the same nutritious meals and snacks during the summer as those offered during the school year. The Food Research and Action Center reports that in July 2001, only 3.2 million youth around the nation received food through federal summer nutrition programs, as compared to 15.3 million youth who receive meals through such programs during the school year.¹

According to the U.S. Department of Education, as of September 2000, 25% of all school districts and 55% of high-poverty urban schools provide summer school for struggling students.² Though summer programs provide an essential service to youth and the community, these programs are often among the first to be affected by budget cuts. In Washington, D.C., summer school enrollment has been reduced by 50% due to budget constraints; New York City has proposed a budget cut which could reduce summer attendance by 35,000 youth; and Kansas City, Kansas, may eliminate its summer school program completely.³ Communities increasingly are looking toward grants like the 21st CCLC program to provide youth with safe and enriching summer experiences: the first year 21st CCLC grants were awarded, two-thirds of the grantees operated a summer program in addition to afterschool programs.⁴

Closing the Achievement Gap Throughout the Summer

- New Futures for Little Rock Youth, a community-based organization in Little Rock, Arkansas, partners with Brandeis University to offer the Summer Transitions youth program, which is funded in part by 21st CCLC grants and the DeWitt-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund. The program aims to promote work-preparedness by helping youth understand the connection between education and work, witness first-hand opportunities in the labor market and help youth who are at-risk for falling behind in school. In the past, the project-based learning program engaged youth in constructing a science lab, pool tables and portable greenhouses. One participating site reported increased math scores at the end of the summer.⁵
- Summer school in Clackamas County, Oregon recently expanded to include enrichment and academic activities for both at-risk and high-achieving elementary students. Youth can select reading and math classes in addition to music, art and science programs. The program, which provides bus transportation for students, is funded through federal grants and local public dollars.

So many kids can lose so much during the summer, and I wanted them to keep up that momentum of learning on a daily basis.

-Andrea Rohm, parent⁶

Encouraging Service and Volunteerism

- Middle school age youth learn by providing service to the community as part of the Summer of Service program created by the Children's Discovery Museum in San Jose, California. Youth work in teams and focus on different service themes: the environment, very young children, underserved populations and the Children's Museum itself. Mondays through Thursdays the teams dedicate several hours to service within their focus areas and reserve time for group discussion and reflection on lessons learned through the service experience. On Fridays, youth spend time on recreation activities such as going to the beach or visiting local theme parks.⁷
- Camp Fire USA Sunshine Council in Lakeland, Florida offers youth the opportunity to travel and provide service through its Camp Fire 66 summer program. Embarking on a mystery road trip, teams of youth must piece together clues, navigate highways and budget their food and gas allowance while travelling across the region to various service project sites arranged by the program leaders. Youth work with other local organizations like AmeriCorps programs, homeless shelters and state parks to complete projects such as painting homes for senior citizens, planting native vegetation to prevent erosion and participating in river cleanups.⁸

Keeping Kids Healthy

- In Ohio, Nelsonville Public Library's "Book Camp" program partners with the local Meals on Wheels to make meals available to youth through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). More than 70 youth per day eat breakfast at the library and spend the rest of the morning engaged in activities related to the books they have read. Lunch is also served and many youth choose to remain at the library in the afternoon as well. Library director Stephen Hodges feels the SFSP meals attract youth who might not otherwise spend their summer days in a library.

Once you feed a hungry kid, everything else pales in comparison.

-Stephen Hodges, Director, Nelsonville Public Library⁹

- The Energy Express summer program in Kanawha County, West Virginia provides youth with books as well as meals through support from the West Virginia University Extension Service and a 21st CCLC grant. Each week of the six week program focuses on a different book and youth are given a copy for themselves to keep. Past programs have increased students' reading levels significantly. Youth are led by college AmeriCorps members who help with the literacy activities and serve breakfast and lunch to program participants. The program motto is "Where breakfast, lunch and learning don't take a summer break."

A lot of these kids don't have adequate nutrition. With Energy Express, they come back to school as healthy as they were in the spring.

-Ruth Ellen Phillips, Energy Express co-creator
West Virginia University Extension Service¹⁰

¹ Food Research and Action Center, "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report," June 2002.

² U.S. Department of Education, "21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America's Families," September 2000.

³ Coeyman, Marjorie, "Summer Schools-Despite Rising Role- Face Major Cuts," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 May 2002.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, "21st Century Community Learning Centers."

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, "Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs," April 2000.

⁶ Crombie, Noelle, "Canby's Summer School a Winner," *The Oregonian*, 27 June 2002.

⁷ Sutterfield, Carolyn, "A Community Commitment: Serving Middle Schoolers at the Children's Discovery Museum," *Dimensions* (Nov/Dec 2000) 11.

⁸ Camp Fire USA, "Camp Fire USA >Teens," http://www.campfire.org/teens/teens_action/, 9 July 2002.

⁹ Food Research and Action Center, "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation."

¹⁰ Pariser, Marea, "Energized Summer School Becomes Summer Fun with Energy Express," *The Charleston Gazette*, 20 July 2001.